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THE LOST MINE.

By JAMES KNAPP REEVE.

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"Dick saw the movement and cried out."

"Don't do that, Easton," he cried.

"For heaven's sake, give yourself over."

"There's no use talking," returned the other, with a grim look down the mountain side.

"If you throw the rope off, I swear I will jump into the side with you."

"I don't care," Easton said, "I am not in a hurry."

"I can hold on."

"Even as he spoke, he felt his feet slipping from under him by the treacherous ice."

The burro train had kept on along the path after their leaders, and the foremost one had now come so close that Dick felt its warm breath blowing him.

He turned, and flung one arm about the burro's neck and threw his weight upon it.

The little animal seemed itself and stood firm as a rock.

Dick felt as though the earth had suddenly grown solid beneath him, and he started with renewed courage to Easton.

Later he began again to pull himself up hand over hand upon the rock, and soon stood safely beside Dick.

"That was a narrow squeak," he said looking back.

"You have saved my life."

"No," exclaimed Dick. "We both owe this to this little fellow here."

He pointed the burro affectionately toward the head as he spoke.

It was not in the nature of either man to make much of such an incident.

It served to cement their friendship still closer and to give each renewed assurance that he could depend upon the other in any hour of need, a fact which they were to have ample opportunity to test in the time yet to come.

On through the dry kept up the weary struggle. None but the old-fashioned mountaineers could have kept the trail, at times when he was almost at a loss to know where their course lay.

But before night they had made the trail, and passed and stood looking down upon the plain which reached endlessly from the farther base of the mountain.

Easton stretched out his hand toward it.

"The Indians named it right when they called it the 'Mill Flare,' Dick. It is even enough, as many a poor fellow has found and as his blenching bones will tell us."

It was again night when they came to the edge of the desert. Instead of camping, they made but a brief rest and pushed on.

Until daylight they kept up a steady silent march. David, the old Indian came up, big and red, from out the eastern edge of that ocean of sand, they making the pumkins, picked the burros, made a hasty breakfast and then, man to man, they started on their way to rest.

"Dick went to sleep, with the cool air of the morning still blowing across the plain. Three hours later he awoke with a start. At first he thought some huge burning glass had been focused upon him. His hands and face were blistered. The sand was as hot as though it were molten lead."

Dick sat up and looked about him. As far as the eye could reach was the broken level of sand—level except where the wind had swept it into hollows and ridges. From horizon to horizon there was nothing to break the monotony except the polished silver white dome of the mountain behind them and the scanty tufts of cactus and sage brush in the brown waste.

The burros were browsing at a little distance, and a red away sat Easton, his hands down up his head, with his hands between them, and his vision his attitude expressing almost lifeless dejection. Dick got up and went toward him, the sand burning his feet at every step.

When Easton raised his face, Dick first thought that his companion had suddenly gone insane. His face was deadly pale, his eyes were bloodshot and sunken.

In answer to Dick's exclamation he pointed, without looking at either, to where they had stood the water jars. When unloading in the early morning they had placed these carefully, and now they were lying on the sand. White the two men stooped one of the pack animals had strayed among the goods and under the jars. The water was gone. Dick took it all in a glance.

"There is not a drop left."

"For answer Easton shook his head silently."

"And there is none to be had until we are across the desert?"

Easton extended his arms and pointed to the east and the west.

"It is a day's journey either way," he said.

"It is useless to go either way."

"But you would not stay here to die like a dog?"

"Easton looked at him with his tongue and began to lick his lips for moisture. The Dick. He had not felt thirst before, but now he was suddenly conscious that his own mouth and throat were parched and burning."

Neither man was afraid of death, and the presence of any foe on danger that they could have fought would have fought stubbornly, but this was the end. But this moment appalled them.

Dick looked about him, toward the four points of the compass. Everywhere was the same brown desert, the sage and the cactus, and the sky like burnished brass above. But anything was better than this insupportable heat. He went to work, placing the pack animals upon the peaks and loading the burros.

Easton came toward him and protested petulantly.

"It's no use, Dick. I tell you. We might as well die here."

"We will try. If we can hold out ten hours."

Easton finally gave some assistance in ready walking in the shadow of death. After this they wasted no words. Suddenly they rode on through the desert. The sun scorched and burned them. The beasts plodded on, taking their own time, their tongues lolling. The eyes of the men grew bloodshot. Their mouths were open to catch any passing breeze of cooling air, but instead only the stifling heat of the alkali plain came to them. The hours passed, and it was high noon. They reined, sick and dizzy, in their saddles. Then a cry broke from Dick's parched throat.

"Easton looked up to see what had caused it. His companion was pointing straight ahead and urging him to go faster pace. Right ahead, so close that Dick felt his heart beat faster to think how close, was a clump of green timbers, a sure sign of water. There was no mistaking it. He was in his face, but he changed again and soon into dejected stertion. Dick said this. "I know," he said, "it is not so near as it seems, but it is not so very far away. We can reach it."

Hurged his beast forward again with feverish impatience.

Easton shook his head despondently. "It is a cheat," he said. "A mirage. It is where we drank last night."

Dick turned upon him incredulously. Then his face grew still more grave and his eyes were fixed upon the mirage. "That is the conviction came to him that his companion's mind had gone. Easton's eyes were fixed upon the mirage. "Look at the beast," he said. "If there was water, they would seek it."

The animals were gliding on with unerring step, heads down and tongues lolling as if they had been from the desert. At this Dick's heart sank and he said that he was not so near as it seems, but it is not so very far away. We can reach it."

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